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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 001324

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MASS](#) [PBTS](#) [GG](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: PRESSING RUSSIA FOR RESTRAINT ON GEORGIA

REF: A. DAS BRYZA 2/10 E-MAIL
[1](#)B. MOSCOW 1045

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Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns. Reasons: 1.4(B & D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In a February 9 meeting with Chief of Defense General Baluyevskiy, Ambassador Burns urged that Russia exercise restraint in its dealings with Georgia. Baluyevskiy was blunt in complaining about Georgian demands to withdraw peacekeepers from Georgia and charged Tbilisi with interference in the implementation of the May 2005 military withdrawal agreement.

-- Ambassador updated DFM Karasin February 10 on U.S. efforts to work with the Georgian leadership to ease tensions, and pressed again for Russian restraint. Karasin repeated concerns about possible Georgian Parliament action, but acknowledged U.S. efforts and previewed the oral message that FM Lavrov planned to send Secretary Rice.

-- During February 9 consultations, DFM Grushko told PDAS Volker that the Kosovo settlement would inevitably set a precedent for the resolution of Georgia's separatist conflicts. PDAS Volker explained why the U.S. viewed Kosovo as a unique situation.

-- MFA 4th CIS Department (Caucasus) Director Kelin provided a readout of his February 6-7 talks in Tbilisi -- his message was that Russia did not seek to aggravate the situation in South Ossetia, but had no intention of withdrawing its peacekeepers.

-- DFM Grushko said Moscow was planning on hosting Georgian PM Noghaidei at the end of the month and hoped to avoid violent incidents in the interim. He dismissed any role for outside peacekeepers or mediators in the South Ossetian conflict. Volker said the U.S. was ready to be helpful -- through the OSCE or directly -- to encourage a political resolution and urged that Russia continue to engage with Georgia on concrete, positive steps for a settlement.

End Summary.

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BALUYEVSKIY AND KARASIN: GEORGIANS MAKING RASH DEMANDS

[1](#)2. (C) Ambassador Burns met February 9 with General of the Army Yuriy Baluyevskiy, Russia's Chief of Defense, to discuss military cooperation and regional conflicts (septel). In the meeting, Baluyevskiy was blunt in charging the Georgian leadership with making "irrational" demands and interfering with the implementation of the May 2005 agreement to withdraw Russian forces from Georgia. Turning to Russian peacekeepers serving in South Ossetia, he complained about Georgian demands to withdraw the forces. The Ambassador urged that

Russia exercise restraint and work to maintain stability, noting that we had the same message for the Georgians. Baluyevskiy argued that independence for Kosovo would have a direct bearing on the Abkhaz and South Ossetia conflicts.

13. (C) In a separate conversation on February 10, the Ambassador updated DFM Grigoriy Karasin on U.S. efforts to work with the Georgian leadership to ease tensions, and pressed again for Russian restraint. Karasin repeated concerns about possible Georgian Parliament action, but acknowledged U.S. efforts and previewed the oral message that FM Lavrov planned to send Secretary Rice (ref a). The Ambassador strongly encouraged Karasin to take maximum advantage of upcoming visits to Moscow by Georgian State Minister for Separatist Conflicts Khaindrava and PM Noghaideli.

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GRUSHKO: KOSOVO AS PRECEDENT

14. (C) During February 9 consultations in Moscow with DFM Aleksandr Grushko (other topics septel), PDAS Kurt Volker emphasized the importance of continued, direct engagement between Moscow and Tbilisi. The U.S. was concerned that Moscow's views on Georgia's territorial integrity had shifted, particularly in light of disagreements in the UN Security Council over the UNOMIG mandate rollover and high-level statements about the precedential value of a Kosovo settlement. Volker explained why the U.S. viewed Kosovo as unique; attempts to equate the resolution of that situation with other frozen conflicts had serious, far-reaching implications. Regarding Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Volker said, the U.S. was encouraging Georgia to engage constructively with Russia, to focus on political rather than military solutions, and to step up political and economic reforms supporting a settlement.

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15. (C) DFM Grushko claimed Russia had not changed its basic position on Kosovo, but said it was obvious "in real life" that the resolution of Kosovo would set a precedent. It would be difficult to argue that Kosovo was unique; Russia's policy in this case was reflected in President Putin's January 31 press conference statement. (NOTE: Putin asked rhetorically in the press conference why South Ossetia and Abkhazia could not be independent if Kosovo was given independence).

16. (C) As to the deletion of references to the Boden paper in the UNOMIG renewal, Grushko argued that the Abkhaz had never accepted the paper. MFA 4th CIS Department (Caucasus) Director Andrey Kelin added that Russia supported Georgia's territorial integrity (Comment: Without further defining that term). He noted that the February Friends of Georgia meeting in Geneva had referred to the Boden paper, but had recalled as well other settlement proposals (such as the plan put forward by former PM and FM Yevgeniy Primakov). Grushko urged that instead of pursuing "fruitless" arguments over final status issues, Tbilisi should follow through on Saakashvili's three-step UNGA proposal to build trust with the Abkhaz. Abkhaz "President" Bagasph was under political pressure from the Abkhaz people as well because he was seen as too accommodating; Georgia needed to provide security guarantees and work on economic joint projects to build ties.

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KELIN IN TBILISI: MAKING IT TO THE END OF FEBRUARY

17. (C) Director Kelin briefed on his February 6-7 talks in Tbilisi with the Georgian government, characterizing his trip as being prompted by the "artificial" situation created by Georgian legislation mandating parliamentary review of the status of Russian peacekeepers in South Ossetia. Kelin spelled out Moscow's message: Russia does not want to

aggravate the situation, but Moscow will not withdraw Russian forces from the conflict zone and "abandon" the South Ossetians -- this would lead to fighting. Russia assumed the Georgian Parliament -- perhaps after some delays -- would demand the withdrawal of the Russians. The key question for Moscow would be how Saakashvili would handle this demand. Georgia could choose to use violence to try to achieve its aims or could pursue the path of discussion and negotiation.

18. (C) Kelin said he found at least some interlocutors in Georgia who were prepared to pursue a political path, particularly State Minister for Separatist Conflicts Minister Khaindrava. Khaindrava was prepared to attend a proposed February 21 JCC meeting in Vienna to discuss elements of the Saakashvili and Kokoity proposals on South Ossetia. Russia was planning to host Georgian PM Noghaideli in Moscow February 27-28 to continue discussions on South Ossetia and perhaps initial a technical agreement implementing Russia's decision to withdraw its forces from some Georgian bases. Kelin said there were opportunities to make progress if the parties could avoid violence until the end of February. Georgia and Russia had agreed to maintain silence and avoid provocations until then, but this would be difficult, Kelin stressed, if Georgia continued to take steps like the February 8 arrest of Russian peacekeepers for visa violations.

MFA: NO TO OUTSIDE PEACEKEEPERS OR MEDIATORS

19. (C) DFM Grushko said the Russian peacekeepers were in South Ossetia to carry out a mandated task of keeping the peace -- they were not present to bring about a political settlement. He dismissed what he called Tbilisi's argument that the replacement of Russian peacekeepers with others would lead to peace and reunification. Grushko said Russia had a "very negative" view of a multinational peacekeeping force in Georgia, arguing that what was needed was a political solution, not a change of peacekeepers. Kelin was similarly dismissive about suggestions that other OSCE members, including the U.S., become involved in the JCC process, arguing that it would be unhelpful and that Georgia and South Ossetia needed to resolve their problems directly. Volker noted that Russian actions -- issuing passports and allowing Russians to serve in the South Ossetian administration -- created a direct role for Russia that had to be taken into account. He said the U.S. was ready to be helpful -- through the OSCE or directly -- to encourage a political settlement.

110. (C) Grushko reiterated Kelin's hopes that violence could be avoided before PM Noghaideli was scheduled to arrive in late-February. He agreed that "reasonable" Georgians wanted to pursue a political solution, but said that while Georgians might want to live in a unified state, Georgia was doing little to make unification attractive to separatists.

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Volker disagreed, noting that Georgia was focused on political and economic reform and integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions. He stressed the importance of Russia's direct engagement with the Georgians, focusing on concrete steps for a settlement and avoiding unilateral actions.

111. (C) PDAS Volker did not have the opportunity to clear this message.
BURNS